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EPA Prioritizes Data, Safety During Today's Gold King Mine Response

Durango, CO – The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency today helped stand up a Joint Information Center (JIC) in Durango, Colorado to provide information about the state, regional, tribal and federal response to the Gold King Mine incident. The agency also announced that EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy will visit Durango, Colorado and Farmington, New Mexico on Wednesday to inspect response efforts relating to the release of waste water from Gold King mine, and meet with state, local and tribal officials and community members.

The JIC's primary goal today was data gathering and quality assessment, in order to ensure the health and safety of all those who live, work and play along the Animas River, San Juan River and Cement Creek. Data is being gathered for water, sediment, and private wells.

Local communities will be making individual decisions about lifting restrictions on water use for recreation, drinking and agriculture. To assist in those decisions, EPA is validating new water quality data for August 7, 8, and 9. That data is now being validated by external contractors, and while we cannot release the data points today, we would like to report that the general data trend matches what we've previously released.

Preliminary results are promising, Administrator McCarthy said today in Washington, DC. The administrator's full remarks are available at <http://www2.epa.gov/goldkingmine/epa-administrator-gina-mccarthy-8112015-remarks-gold-king-mine>

As soon as the new data has been validated we will release it on the just-launched response website. That site, <http://www2.epa.gov/goldkingmine>, is now being regularly updated with data, fact sheets and other information for local residents and for the media. The agency will also use this new data to assist local communities in making determinations about recreational, drinking, and agricultural water.

Local and national media inquiries can now be sent to press@epa.gov. A phone line has been set to handle local and national media inquiries; that number is 970-812-3351 and will be staffed by press officers within the Joint Information Center.

In New Mexico, EPA has federal on-scene coordinators, two water quality experts and thirty technicians and contractors responding to the spill as it reaches communities in the state. EPA mobile command center is operational in Farmington. EPA is continuing collecting water quality samples from nine locations in the river near intakes for Aztec, Farmington, Lower Valley Water Users Association, Morning Star Water Supply System and the North Star Water User Association. Each of these locations will continue to be monitored as the spill makes its way past these areas. Additionally, teams of qualified technicians are going door-to-door to collect samples for laboratory analysis.

New Mexico Department of Game and Fish biologist and game warden monitoring found wild birds with stains were able to fly and rehabilitation has not been required. NM Game & Fish did not observe any fish kills during yesterday's overflight.

The EPA's Region 9 office, which covers Arizona and the Navajo Nation, continues to be in close communication with the Navajo Nation and is coordinating with them on various efforts including sampling and community outreach. By mid-week, the agency expects to have 15 staff and contractors on site to handle emergency response, water sampling and communications/coordination with the Navajo Nation and other stakeholders. Region 9 Administrator Jared Blumenfeld plans to visit the area Thursday, going to Farmington, Shiprock and Durango. Community Involvement Coordinators (CICs) are partnering with various Navajo officials, Navajo incident command, and other responding agencies to ensure comprehensive outreach to all affected Navajo Chapters.

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